

Appendix 11.C Basic Tips for Collaboration

Identifying Potential Partners

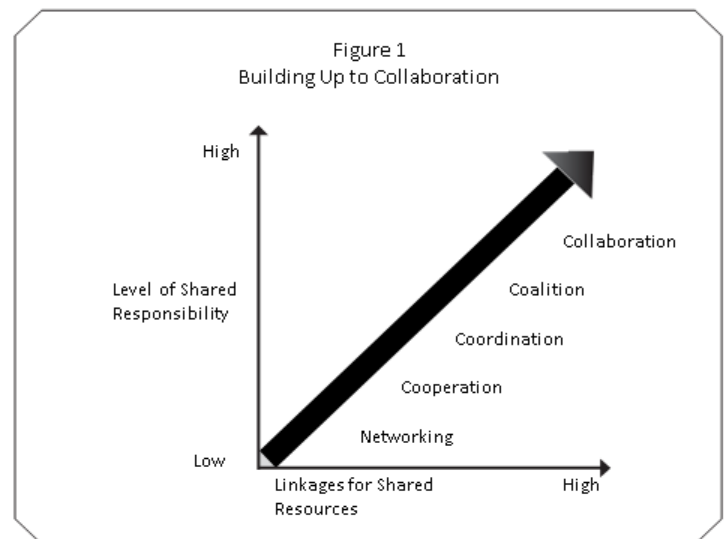
Collaboration is a two-way street. People who work with children and youth experiencing homelessness often do so with little or no targeted financial resources. Collaboration with other programs in the school district and community agencies is an essential tool to access services for homeless students. When deciding to pursue a collaborative partnership, it is helpful to

- identify the needs of homeless students in your district;
- know the responsibilities of other programs and community agencies in your district;
- identify areas of interest or overlap between homeless education and other programs and agencies;
- consider how other programs and agencies can provide assistance and be sure to determine how the assistance can benefit them, if undertaken; and
- consider how you can provide reciprocal support, if possible.

Once a potential collaborative relationship is identified, determine your key contact person in the program or agency. Communicate regularly, and keep the issues germane to students as your focus.

Realizing the Level of Involvement Needed

The term *collaborative efforts* is used loosely here to describe a relationship where two or more individuals or groups work on behalf of the education of children and youth experiencing homelessness. The degree to which the parties share responsibilities and resources can vary greatly across partnerships, as shown in Figure 1.



Relationships can range from low-level networking to true collaboration, which, by definition, is the highest level of shared responsibility in which resources are integrated. When reaching out to other programs and agencies, it is important to consider the level of relationship that may be needed to realize goals and to build on

existing relationships. When new partners are sought, consider working on lower-level relationships to build trust before attempting more complex interactions.

Initiating the Collaboration

Once you have considered how to make collaboration a win-win opportunity for students, it is time to approach the individuals, programs, or agencies with whom the prospective partnership will be formed.

Suggested activities for accomplishing a collaborative partnership include the following:

- Schedule a time to meet with the individual in charge of the program or agency.
- Prepare for the meeting by identifying the key points to be discussed.
- Explain your role as local liaison.
- Share what is needed in the district to support children and youth experiencing homelessness.
- Ask the individual for his/her support based on the program's or agency's responsibilities.
- Offer concrete suggestions for actions that can be taken by program or agency staff.
- Enter the meeting with a positive outlook and plan to leave with a specific commitment for support.

Developing the Collaboration

True collaborative relationships are often the result of growth. In fact, many collaborative agreements are sustained by building upon existing structures. While not all collaboration needs to be intense, key features of successful collaboration include the following:

- establishing a common goal, purpose, or focus;
- communicating regularly;
- sharing resources; and
- prioritizing and strategizing together.

Be sure to build in opportunities to discuss and develop these features when creating and maintaining relationships with other programs and agencies.

Collaboration Meets Many Needs

Most local liaisons have other responsibilities in addition to serving homeless children and youth. Unfortunately, if someone is experiencing homelessness, their plight is full-time. Combining efforts increases services to homeless students while reducing the time needed by the liaison to provide the services. By collaborating with the various school district programs and community agencies, the provision of services to the child or youth can become richer, more comprehensive, and more effective.

Table 11.1 Levels of Collaborative Effort

Level	Description	Example
Networking	Making connections with individuals or groups whose purpose is related to your mission	Having copies of the transportation department's meeting minutes forwarded to you
Cooperation	Working together on a limited basis	Asking a Spanish teacher to translate a document to be used to promote the educational rights of students experiencing homelessness in the Spanish-speaking community
Coordination	Combined effort on an initiative that meets the needs of both parties	Arranging with school nurses to refer children experiencing homelessness for free or low- cost medical and dental care
Coalition	Regular communication and sharing of resources, but each group still retains control over its domain	Agreeing on a process to ensure that student services, the local liaison, and the transportation department communicate when a homeless student has a change of address to ensure that the bus transports the student to and from the location where the student is currently staying
Collaboration	Working together and pooling resources to meet a common purpose or goal	The school and local liaison work with the parent(s) or guardian(s) to provide the best educational program for the student experiencing homelessness